

## Fluoride in Drinking Water – Jan. 7, 2011

The federal government is considering reducing the amount of fluoride added to drinking water to prevent dental cavities. Americans have many more sources of fluoride than they did when water fluoridation was introduced in the 1940s, from toothpaste to mouthwashes and fluoride supplements.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [announced steps](#) Jan. 7 to ensure standards and guidelines on fluoride in drinking water continue to protect the American people while promoting good dental health, especially in children. HHS proposed the recommended level of fluoride at the lowest end of the current optimal range, and EPA is beginning a review of the maximum amount of fluoride allowed in drinking water. HHS' proposed recommendation of 0.7 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water replaces the current recommended range of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams.

If the change is adopted by the EPA and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the Milwaukee Water Works would add less fluoride to the water than it does now. Fluoride naturally occurs in Lake Michigan at 0.15 mg/L. Milwaukee's tap water currently contains 1.1 mg/L of fluoride, in conformance with current regulations. A simple adjustment to fluoride additions systems will allow the new dosage to be added properly.

Per the HHS/EPA statement, there are several reasons for making changes in the amount of fluoride in drinking water over time. Unlike the 1940s, treated drinking water is now one of several sources of fluoride. Other common sources include dental products such as toothpaste and mouth rinses, prescription fluoride supplements, and fluoride applied by dental professionals. Water fluoridation and fluoride toothpaste are largely responsible for the significant decline in tooth decay in the U.S. over the past several decades. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named the fluoridation of drinking water one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.

The American Dental Association (ADA) also released a statement that read in part: "As a science-based organization, the ADA supports the Department of Health and Human Services' recommendation to set the level for optimally fluoridated water at 0.7 parts per million. This adjustment will provide an effective level of fluoride to reduce the incidence of tooth decay while minimizing the rate of fluorosis in the general population." Read the [ADA statement](#).

The Milwaukee Common Council in 1953 authorized the addition of fluoride to Milwaukee's drinking water to prevent tooth decay. The American Dental Association endorsed drinking water fluoridation in 1950; the American Medical Association endorsed this in 1951. It is expected the new guidance will be released in spring of this year.

Consumers can be assured Milwaukee drinking water meets or exceeds all EPA and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulatory requirements for safe and healthful drinking water. The Milwaukee Water Works is committed to protecting public health. Consumers with health concerns are asked to consult with their doctor. Find Milwaukee's water quality information at [www.milwaukee.gov/water](http://www.milwaukee.gov/water). Select About MWW, then select [Water Quality](#).

*The Milwaukee Water Works serves Milwaukee and 15 suburbs: Brown Deer, Butler, Franklin, Greendale, Greenfield, Hales Corners, St. Francis, Menomonee Falls, Mequon, New Berlin, Shorewood, Thiensville, Wauwatosa, West Allis and West Milwaukee.*

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